

Presenters: Colonel Rob Manning, Director, Defense Press Office; Major Adrian Rankine-Galloway, Pentagon Spokesman
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Department Of Defense Off-Camera Press Briefing by Colonel Manning

COLONEL ROB MANNING: Good morning. Thanks for joining us today and welcome to our Monday gaggle here at the Department of Defense. My name is Colonel Rob Manning and I'm the Director of Press Operations. For awareness, our routine press engagements include this weekly gaggle, typically on the first day of the week.

And we typically conduct an update brief on Tuesday from either Iraq or Afghanistan. Tomorrow we're scheduled for an update from Iraq. You can receive more details on that via our press releases and advisories. And then on Thursdays, we do a weekly press conference with the Assistant to the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, Ms. Dana White.

Also if you're not receiving notifications of our media events, let us know and we'll add you to our distro. We also send the responses to taken questions during our briefs, so it's important that you're added to this distro.

And then as usual, I'd like to reinforce that we have a team of press desk officers here who are subject matter experts on a range of issues, dealing with the combatant commands and the functional components of the Department of Defense.

And they're available 24 hours a day, seven days a week for any queries that you have regarding the Department of Defense.

[Long Pause]

First, I'd like to say that we offer our thoughts and prayers to the families and friends of the U.S. service members who lost their lives last week.

Both the crew of the Navy F-18 aircraft that went down March 14th and the service members aboard the U.S. Air Force HH-60 that went down on March 15th.

The tragic loss of these American service members are a reminder to all of us of the dedication of brave men and women who place their lives in harm's way all over the world every day to protect American people.

Both of these incidents remain under investigation, and as soon as we fully understand what took place, we'll share that with you.

[Long Pause]

Now an update on operations to defeat ISIS in Iraq and Syria:

In Ninewah, Iraq, the ISF conducted clearance operations, resulting in the confiscation of a large cache of weapons near Badush, to include small arms, hand grenades, ammunition and explosives.

Near Hawijah, 10 IEDs and three tunnel networks were destroyed and more than 50 IEDs were destroyed near Tal Kayf.

In Anbar, the ISF conducted clearance operations, resulting in the clearance of several structures in the vicinity of Akashat, and confiscation of munitions. In separate operations in Anbar, ISF destroyed large quantities of explosives and more than 10 rockets.

In Syria:

The Syrian Democratic Forces continued to develop their defensive positions in the MERV.

We remain concerned about the situation in northwest Syria and call on all parties to remain focused on defeating ISIS, de-escalating and resolving the Syrian conflict, and protecting innocent civilians.

We are not involved in the movement of the forces of either side, but we are very concerned about the effect that the fighting there has had on our Defeat-ISIS efforts, and would like to see an end to the hostilities before ISIS has the opportunity to regroup in eastern Syria. We should not and cannot allow ISIS to breathe at this critical point.

We have recognized Turkey's legitimate security concerns on its borders. We are also deeply concerned about the prospects of combat in densely populated areas. Further operations beyond the border regions will draw in more forces and further exacerbate an already deteriorating humanitarian situation.

We are absolutely concerned about these reports indicating civilians are unable to access potable water and deteriorating conditions. Clean water is vital to survival and we encourage all parties to allow these resources and humanitarian aid to resume unhindered throughout Syria.

We again call on all parties to remain focused on defeating ISIS, adhere to UNSCR 2401, protect innocent civilians, and avoid actions that would escalate tensions in that area.

On the Niger investigation:

Last Thursday the secretary said that "he expects the chairman to send him his endorsement memorandum on the investigation." The secretary has "already asked a few questions on the report, and will study what the chairman sends him, compare the two and move forward." The secretary remains committed to getting this right, and when his endorsement is ready, we'll brief you in much more detail than we can now.

And with that, I'll take your questions.

Q: You mentioned you're very concerned about losing momentum in the fight in Syria. Could you comment more specifically on the statements by President Erdogan on him expanding the Turkish military operations into -- combine the other areas of northern Syria, as well as into Iraq?

COL. MANNING: Our concern right now is to make sure that all parties of the 70 nation global coalition in Syria to fight ISIS remains focused on ISIS. That's what I meant by we remain focused on that effort.

Q: But does -- but does your concern grow as he seems to be expanding the Turkish military operations into Iraq potentially?

COL. MANNING: We recognize Turkey's concerns. They're a NATO ally, they're the only NATO ally with an active insurgency within their borders, and we are in contact -- close contact with -- with Turkey through ongoing diplomatic talks.

Q: So are you trying to talk them out of this expansion? Is that what you're saying?

COL. MANNING: We have a results oriented mechanism for diplomatic talks with Turkey that we're leveraging.

Q: Will -- will the (U.S.-led coalition ?) defend the SDF in case they are being attacked in Manbij or Kobani, for example? Is there any like -- what's your (guess on that ?)?

COL. MANNING: As you know, we have U.S. forces in Manbij. We do not have U.S. forces in Afrin, in Western Syria. We've made that very clear, that U.S. forces are in Manbij.

Again this goes back to the need to focus on the defeat of ISIS. It's been very clear to all parties that U.S. forces are there and we'll take measures to make sure that we deconflict.

Q: Let me follow up -- let me get a question. Let's be more specific -- (inaudible), in case the Turkish armed forces attack the SDF, the YPG in Manbij, do you ask Afrin, its partners in Manbij, against any Turkish --

COL. MANNING: I'm not going to comment on hypotheticals. What I am going to tell you is that we have U.S. forces in Manbij. We've made it very clear that they're there and we're in close, continuous contact with all forces on the ground.

Q: Is it your intent -- is it your intent to remain in Manbij? Keep U.S. forces there?

COL. MANNING: I'll have to get back to you on that. We have no indication to do otherwise. Adrian, do you have anything to add on that?

MAJOR ADRIAN RANKINE-GALLOWAY: No. We've got no indication otherwise.

Q: Colonel, who's to blame for the civilian casualties in -- (inaudible) -- Afrin?

COL. MANNING: What I will tell you is that we highly encourage avoiding any civilian casualties. We are talking to all parties involved to make sure that we can mitigate the loss of civilian life -- and we can only do that through dialogue. There are ongoing diplomatic talks to make sure that we can mitigate and avoid civilian casualties, and we're going to allow that to progress.

Q: Who's to blame for all this?

COL. MANNING: What's more important is that what's going on right now is taking away from the fight against ISIS, and potentially allowing ISIS to regain a foothold. We've got to shift focus back on the reason that that 70-member global coalition is there, and that is to defeat ISIS.

Q: Colonel, building on what you just said about, you know, the focus is on ISIS, and we've heard that repeatedly to distraction -- (inaudible), eight years now, (fighting begins ?) in Syria. The capture of Afrin, and the subsequent -- and similar capture of East Ghouta -- I can never pronounce it correctly -- are they pivotal points now? Are we going to be pivoting in a war where the other side, to use the term loosely -- might be a words, (but mine ?) will continue their offensive actions, further drawing away the focus (on end ?) of ISIS?

COL. MANNING: I'm not going to speculate on that, but as you have just indicated, it does draw focus away from the primary reason that we are there, and that is ISIS. So anything that takes focus away from that is not helpful.

Q: So are you seeing -- are you seeing -- you're talking -- you talk about, you don't want ISIS to regain momentum. You talk about the SDF continuing to develop defensive positions. So in the -- in the MERV, what are you actually seeing, in terms of ISIS resurgence?

COL. MANNING: I'm not going to talk specific operational details or intelligence matters, but our operations in the MERV have not kept pace with the same momentum that they had prior to the events in Afrin. And it's not optimal.

Q: When was the last time the secretary spoke with his Turkish counterpart?

COL. MANNING: We'll take that.

Q: Are there any planned -- calls planned today?

COL. MANNING: Not that I'm aware of. We are in close and continuous contact...but we'll take that.

Q: You're concerned about though, potable water that you mentioned. That's in Afrin, where the water supply's been cut off?

COL. MANNING: We are concerned about a humanitarian crisis and the restriction of vital resources for civilians in the Afrin area.

Q: Has the Department of Defense been contacted in connection with the Austin bombings, and are you all part of the investigation that's ongoing?

COL. MANNING: Not that I'm aware of. We'll take that.

Q: Colonel, on this potable water and resource thing, where specifically are you talking about? Or who is cutting off the water? What -- what do you have -- (inaudible)?

COL. MANNING: I was very clear in my opening comments, when I say that we're concerned about reports indicating civilians are unable to access possible water. Clean water is vital to survival, and we encourage all parties to allow the free flow of these resources, and much-needed humanitarian aid to flow throughout Syria.

Q: Yeah, who is blocking civilian access to the potable or clean water?

COL. MANNING: I've seen the reports that civilians are not receiving humanitarian aid. And so that is a problem.

Q: Yesterday, the SDF, in its announcement of the Afrin oppression, they said that the -- the YPG is going to get to, you know, resort to -- to kind of guerrilla attacks against Turkish forces. Would you endorse such a move from your partners against Turkish or any other groups inside Syria with guerrilla tactics or -- (inaudible)?

COL. MANNING: Again, I'm not going to comment on speculation or what a particular element may or may not do. What I will tell you is that all of this is not helpful to our primary mission in Syria, which is to defeat ISIS. So you can continue to go down this road where it's what-if, but I'm not going to deal in hypotheticals. What I know for a fact is that what's going on right now is - distracting from our ability to defeat a very serious threat in Syria, and that's ISIS.

Q: I believe General McGinty said last week publicly that you were (pre-positioning ?) some U.S. troops to Manbij. Can you tell us more about that? What will their mission be -- (inaudible)? He's saying the mission is the troops that are there. Are they there to reinforce them because of concerns that you need to reinforce them? Will they take on more of a peace-keeping role? Since General McGinty brought it up, can you tell us more about that?

COL. MANNING: Sure. Barbara, obviously, I'm not going to talk about future operations or the exact scope of those operations. They're there under the same overarching mission set to defeat ISIS.

Q: So you are indicating that the -- the addition, when you say "they are there," the additional U.S. troops that General McGinty spoke about repositioning have already arrived in Manbij?

COL. MANNING: Barbara, I'd have to refer you to CENTCOM and OIR for specific details as far as their disposition or the status. But as far as their mission goes, their overall mission is to defeat ISIS.

Q: The -- the South Korean press is reporting that the -- the timing of the annual exercises, Foal Eagle and the airborne will be announced tomorrow, Korea time -- (inaudible). But they also indicated that the -- the timeframe for the exercises will be significantly shorter, about half the time as last year, -- (inaudible) -- one instead of two, and that there'll be fewer aircraft and ships involved. And that comes as -- as -- (inaudible) -- that exercises are not being scaled back. Can you help us understand what -- are they being scaled back, or is it just the same amount of activity squeezed in a shorter time? Can you help us understand what's going on with those exercises?

COL. MANNING: First, I don't want to get ahead of an alliance announcement. As we said in the past, we were going to deconflict the exercises from the Olympics and the Paralympics. The Paralympics completed yesterday. So you can anticipate an alliance announcement to come out soon that's going to get as much detail as possible regarding the exercises.

But as far as what you've seen in the press, and how the press is characterizing it, my recommendation to you would be to wait until an alliance announcement comes out with the exact details on the scope and size of this year's exercises.

Q: But without going into any specifics, can you just say if, generally speaking, the scale of the exercise will be similar to last year's?

COL. MANNING: Again, I don't want to get ahead of the actual release. It's important to wait until that release comes out. It's a very detailed release that I think will answer your questions about this routine annual exercise.

Q: Colonel Manning, (inaudible) -- thank you. Is this the case to -- by Korean government or U.S. (own decisions ?) to re-do (this exercise ?)?

COL. MANNING: Our alliance with the Republic of Korea is ironclad. Everything we do with them is an alliance decision, so nothing is unilateral. And as you know, these are combined exercises, so that means Republic of Korea and U.S. forces are working together to ensure their combined readiness in defense of the Korean peninsula.

Q: Is -- is a little bit suspicious about the South Korea North Korea, (they talking ?) you know. (It's accurate ?) -- (inaudible) -- North Korea, so why this exercise a little bit tangy or -- (inaudible)? Why it happens?

COL. MANNING: To answer your first question, and that is the potential talks between the United States and North Korea, I'd refer you to the White House on the planning for that, as well as -- as the State Department. Regarding the annual exercise -- this is not a typical year, because we don't usually have Winter Olympics and Paralympics that take place every year in Korea. So we deconflicted those exercises from the Olympics. That's why you're seeing a process here that has not been done in the past.

Q: North Korea, Kim Jong-un say that he understood about the joint exercise they had in the Korean peninsula. But you have to not change (that tones ?) or -- (inaudible) -- because he said that he understood that. How would you -- (inaudible) -- what he said?

COL. MANNING: How do I respond to what Kim Jong-un said? (Laughter.) So, I will tell you that there's no daylight in the ROK-U.S. alliance. Our alliance is as strong as ever, and these exercises are going to take place to ensure that all forces on the peninsula are ready and prepared to defend the peninsula.

There will be an alliance announcement coming out very shortly that will address any questions you have.

Q: So will that announcement come from U.S. forces or Korea?

COL. MANNING: It's an announcement that will come from the Department of Defense and from the Republic of Korea, their Ministry of Defense or ROK JCS.

And it'll be very descriptive as far as what you can expect for these annual exercises.

Q: Colonel, is -- are there any ongoing negotiations with Iraq for status of forces agreement to keep U.S. troops in Iraq post-ISIS to -- to help with the Iraqi Security Forces (train and equip ?)?

COL. MANNING: We're in Iraq at the request of the Iraqi government. Adrian, do you have anything to add to that?

MAJ. RANKINE-GALLOWAY: We don't have anything to announce at this time.

Q: -- opportunity, you said the SDF were reinforcing defensive positions. Have they switched over from offense to defense in the Middle Euphrates River Valley?

COL. MANNING: Have they switched over from offense to defense?

Q: Are they now in -- has the offense -- (inaudible), and now they're trying to hold ground --

COL. MANNING: No, we remain focused on finding and defeating ISIS.

Q: But you had said that they were reinforcing their defensive positions or something like that.

COL. MANNING: We are using actionable intelligence to defeat ISIS.

Q: Question on -- on defeating ISIS. Are you concerned from how -- because your lack of support to the Kurds, they may eventually stop fighting your war and they may leave the coalition (somehow ?)?

And even the General of the SDF could have -- (inaudible) -- position, because you are very concerned about ISIS, but they have their own mission and you don't want to get involved in (those ones ?), so --

COL. MANNING: I'm not going to go down this road of hypotheticals of what could be -- what we are doing is we are talking to all parties involved in making sure that they understand the importance of doubling down and focusing efforts on the defeat of ISIS. And how important that is so that ISIS does not have the opportunity to regain a foothold in the region.

Q: -- concern wouldn't be -- (inaudible). I mean is the Pentagon concerned that that may happen, and in that case, is already doing something, are you in talks with the Kurds to try to convince them --

COL. MANNING: Well I've already said that we're making sure that we have the lines of communications open to reinforce the reason why we are in Syria, as a part of that 70 nation global coalition.

And then I talked to you about the ongoing diplomatic efforts, as well. And the fact that we have a results oriented mechanism on the diplomatic side to make sure that we can refocus efforts. Sir, go ahead.

Q: -- the White House ordered the Pentagon to conduct a comprehensive review of the defense industrial base, I think it's due sometime next month. Now the White House has ordered new tariffs on steel and aluminum.

What is the Pentagon doing to capture the impact of these tariffs on steel and aluminum to the defense industrial base?

COL. MANNING: We're taking a look at that right now -- we're looking at the impacts. I don't have anything else to announce.

Q: I actually didn't know that. So you're studying that, is that part of the ongoing review or is there a new review? Could you tell me how you're looking at it, just so I can try to --

COL. MANNING: We are taking a hard look at the impacts.

Q: Thank you.

Q: Do you have any information about the U.S. 7th Fleet that will stop at Taiwan's port next month for (a supply ?)?

COL. MANNING: I do not, but I'd refer you to U.S. 7th Fleet. I'm sure they have the details.

Q: -- I already did, but is there any information after -- (inaudible) -- has been signed the policies in regards to (Taiwan ?) that requires -- (inaudible) -- American vessels can stop Taiwan?

COL. MANNING: We'll have to take that, and we'll work with the Department of the Navy in order to get you a response.

Okay, ma'am, Tara?

Q: Thank you.

COL. MANNING: Yes, ma'am.

Q: Back to Manbij. In last April, Rangers were sent there to act as almost a deterrent force for any clashes between Turks and the Kurds. This year with this -- I guess new presence of U.S. forces, will they act again as a deterrent?

Is it only really for ISIS? I mean what will happen if you know, there -- there are increased attacks on Kurdish allies?

COL. MANNING: Again, I can't talk about what could be. What I'll tell you is what is, and that is that we are absolutely focused on ISIS. We are there in Syria to remain focused on the defeat of ISIS, and that is our overarching mission.

Q: -- the authorities to protect Kurdish allies, and will U.S. come to the aid of allies that have been fighting with them in Manbij?

COL. MANNING: Adrian, do you want to address that?

MAJ. RANKINE-GALLOWAY: Essentially, the mechanism by which our enemies can exploit what we will or won't do. So I will say that we do have a small U.S. presence in Manbij. They -- they -- they have been there for some time now, but we are working with our Department of State counterparts using the results-oriented mechanism to resolve a number of shared security issues, one of which is Manbij.

Q: What is a results-oriented --

MAJ. RANKINE-GALLOWAY: The results-oriented mechanism is a language established by the Department of State and the Turkish foreign minister to describe the process by which we are working to defeat ISIS.

Q: What is the military mission of U.S. troops in Manbij? Could you remind us?

MAJ. RANKINE-GALLOWAY: We'll have to take the question.

Q: But if there's fighting in Manbij and U.S. troops are there, won't they, in self defense, have to, you know, defend everyone who's in Manbij?

MAJ. RANKINE-GALLOWAY: I would just, like, echo what Colonel Manning said about, you know, what-ifs. We're not really going to get into what-if happens. What -- what is happening is that U.S. government is working with the Turkish government to resolve a number of shared security interests through the results-oriented mechanism, and we certainly support the Department of State's efforts to resolve the issues, to include the situation in Manbij.

Q: Thanks.

COL. MANNING: (Mary ?)?

Q: Has it been decided that GEN Brooks will transition in Korea?

COL. MANNING: We don't have any personnel decisions to announce right now, but as soon as we do, we'll certainly push that out to you.

Q: Thanks. What is the DOD position on the FSA, the Free Syrian Army in Syria?

COL. MANNING: We'll take that.

Q: Just a quick follow up on General Brooks in Korea. Isn't that tour of duty typically longer? Isn't it usually -- (inaudible)?

COL. MANNING: Again, we don't have any personnel decisions to announce.

Q: Well, just to be clear, so -- but he is leaving early. I mean, he is (inaudible)?

COL. MANNING: I do not know that.

Q: Oh, okay.

Q: Is it -- is it possible if you could give us more details about those contacts with -- from the State Department to Ankara with Turkey?

COL. MANNING: We'll follow up on that.

Q: Okay.

COL. MANNING: No, go ahead -- (inaudible).

Q: We haven't heard from Baghdadi in awhile. Does the Defense Department have any indication whether he's alive, dead, or something in between?

(Laughter.)

COL. MANNING: I certainly hope he's dead. But I can't confirm or deny that.

Q: In the last couple of weeks, as you've said, distractions from the fight against ISIS in the Middle Euphrates River Valley, has ISIS been able to actually regain any of the ground it's lost? And what is -- I feel like we've heard they've lost 98 percent of their territory for the last three or four months. Where -- where do they stand at this point?

COL. MANNING: So the answer to your first question is no, they have not, and I'm not going to get into specific matters of intelligence, I'd refer you to OIR.

Q: Tonight, 15 years ago, the U.S. launched Shock and Awe, and launched the Operation Iraqi Freedom. Can you give us the status on how many forces are on the ground right now, and what is the mission of U.S. troops currently in Iraq?

COL. MANNING: As you know, we're there at the request of the Iraqi government. As far as how many troops are on the ground, there's been no change to our publicly-disclosed number.

Q: Is there no change to the number, or change to the willingness to disclose the number?

COL. MANNING: No change to our publicly-disclosed number in Iraq.

Q: So at present -- you know, you had the Pave Hawk crash last week. It remains all kind -- at least, because of ISIS present, it's still -- (inaudible). What is the current status of our operations in Iraq, and we have, for the service members that are still serving there, 15, you know, since 18 years ago, what is it that they are accomplishing right now in Iraq?

COL. MANNING: Tomorrow at 11 o'clock we'll have a press conference with a commander that's on the ground in Iraq, and I do not want to get ahead of that commander; to ask you to wait until that commander addresses us tomorrow at 11 o'clock via DVIDS in the Pentagon Press Briefing Room.

Q: A couple things -- one, you're not confirming the Korean report that (Brooks ?) is returning, right?

COL. MANNING: Oh, I'm absolutely not confirming. What I said was I don't know.

Q: Okay.

COL. MANNING: And -- and I do not know.

Q: All right. Two, last week, you know, the Air Force was --

COL. MANNING: What I do know is that we don't have any personnel announcements regarding that.

Q: Okay. Because you might be seen as confirming that report, so you're not confirming it.

COL. MANNING: Absolutely not. I do not know. I do not know if General Brooks is going to leave Korea. But what I do know is that once that decision has been made, we'll put out an announcement.

Q: Okay. Did DOD get any heads up that the Air Force was going to put out that for-official-use-only-tagged reference last week to its PR people (to not embed ?) and pull back an engagement? Or was that something that your operation encouraged them to put forward?

COL. MANNING: Yeah, we're aware that the Air Force was doing a review to make sure that their public affairs person, spokespersons, communicators are trained on the parameters for public engagements. I refer you to the Air Force, as far as any specifics on it.

Q: Well, I'm asking you whether you guys were cold-cocked by that, or whether you knew they were going to put out an official-use-only memo that seemed to suggest, "Pull back from public engagement."

COL. MANNING: No. First of all, we are in close and continuous contact with all of our services, so there's no daylight between us. And again, that was a review, a review of their tactics, techniques and procedures for public engagement, which is prudent.

Q: Well, were you -- were you encouraged, though, that they pulled back -

COL. MANNING: I don't have anything else to add. I'm answering your question, but I don't know how else you want me to answer it.

Q: Transgender -- (inaudible) -- that issue. You said the White House -- Secretary Mattis said the -- the transgender (approved ?) to the White House recently. Is that true?

COL. MANNING: Secretary Mattis was provided a recommendation on the implementation policy by a panel. Secretary Mattis reviewed that recommendation, and provided his recommendation to the president. That recommendation for the implementation policy for transgender service members is with the president of the United States, and when the president of the United States reviews it and makes a decision, he'll announce it.

Q: Okay. Can you give us a sense of what the recommendation was from Mattis, though?

COL. MANNING: No, I'm not going to get ahead of that, and obviously, a recommendation between the secretary of defense and the president is privileged information.

Q: Colonel, when did Secretary Mattis provide that recommendation to the White House?

COL. MANNING: We can get you an exact date, but it was within the last month.

Q: How come you didn't announce that he was providing the recommendation, given how -- how -- it was a high -- (inaudible)?

COL. MANNING: We talked about it in the past -- that it was going to be a process by which a panel was established. That panel would provide a recommendation to the secretary of defense. The secretary of defense would then provide a recommendation to the president. And I we even gave you dates. We have talked about it.

Q: But -- (inaudible).

COL. MANNING: Why would you think we wouldn't do something we said we were going to do? We told you we were going to do it.

Q: So you mentioned civilian casualties in Afrin. You expressed concern -- you had expressed concern about civilians -- civilian access to, you know, clean water. However you don't mention who to blame. How do you expect us to report this?

Q: Who should we name or finger points at, you know --

COL. MANNING: You're asking the same questions over and over, and I'm telling you that more than who to blame -- is the need to stop it. And a need to ensure that all parties are focused on the reason why they're there -- ISIS.

Civilian casualties, not getting that humanitarian assistance, a growing humanitarian crisis, it's got to be stopped. It's got to be averted, and it can only be stopped if we achieve the kind of dialogue that's ongoing on the diplomatic front.

Q: Serious question. Will the Space Force have different uniforms than the other services?

(Laughter.)

COL. MANNING: So as you're aware, the President -- our Commander in Chief expressed a desire for us to look at space, which is a very important domain, just like air, maritime, ground. Space is a very important domain.

It's important that we have a defensible space. Our Deputy Secretary of Defense is actually taking a look at this and will provide a recommendation.

Q: Colonel? Is this a new review then, Colonel? I'm sorry, you mentioned the Deputy Secretary of Defense, is this a new review based off of those comments the President made? And we've got a new review the Dep Sec is looking at a Space Force? Is that accurate?

COL. MANNING: The Deputy Secretary of Defense is responsible for exploring this. So I'll have to get back to you as far as what he was looking at before and what he's looking at now. We'll get back to you on that.

I will tell you that it's an important domain. We recognize the President's enthusiasm for this vital domain and we're going to take a look at it.

Q: And if it's in your formal review, we'd like to know about it.

COL. MANNING: We'll do that. You can get with Lieutenant Colonel Jamie Davis.

Q: -- working on that, on this Space Forces like -- are you really considering it?

Q: Does the Secretary have any plans to meet with the Saudi Crown Prince while he is in town, and has he spoken to Pompeo or Haspel since their --

COL. MANNING: So I'm not sure about the Saudi Crown Prince, we can get back to you on that. And I'm not sure if he's coming here. If he does come here, obviously that we'd announce that. And as far as the proposed Secretary of State Pompeo -- I know they have a very good working relationship.

Q: Have they spoken since the news of the (purported combination ?)?

COL. MANNING: I do not know.

STAFF: Okay, last question please.

Q: Yeah, on -- on Iraq, do you anticipate that there will be negotiations on the SOFA Agreement at some point?

COL. MANNING: We'll have to get back to you on that.

Q: The attempted assassination of Sergei Skripal in the UK, do you have any comment on that since --

COL. MANNING: No, no I do not.

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